

## *Agenda Item #17*

### **Protect Puvungna East, the Los Cerritos Wetlands**

**Puvungna** is a sacred site of creation, emergence, and gathering. The **Tongva, Acjachemen, Tataviam, Payomkawichum, and Yuhaviatam** tribes have shared connections to Puvungna, which flourished as a ceremonial center for more than 10,000 years. It continues to be central to the physical and spiritual well being of tribal members, offering a connection to homelands, ancestors and culture. Puvunga is listed with the California Native American Heritage Commission as a Sacred Site extending across southeast Long Beach into Seal Beach. Ceremonies, meetings, and social gatherings held at Puvungna unite a diverse tribal community and local residents as well.

This relationship to place defines tribes as peoples who seek to live in balance through the gifts given by all relations. Drilling, bulldozing, flooding, and building on Sacred Sites is opposed by tribal culture keepers as this violates tribal beliefs which understand all life to be related and deserving of respect. Relocating tribal burials and preserving tribal "artifacts" for research or exhibition will not "mitigate" this destruction. The connection of tribal peoples to Puvungna cannot be determined piecemeal, as it is timeless and inclusive of all manifestations of being.

Tribal members, environmentalists, and local residents have struggled for decades to protect and preserve the **Los Cerritos Wetlands**. Once 2400 acres of lagoons, tidal salt marshes, and alkali meadows formed coastal wetlands supporting the communities of Puvungna and Motuucheyngna. In the past 250 years, ranching, agriculture, flood control, oil drilling, and commercial/residential development have erased all but 500 acres. Although degraded, the remaining wetlands are a unique ecosystem including an ancient salt marsh, salt pannes, seasonal freshwater ponds, and meadowlands supporting marine life, wildlife and local and migratory birds.

**The Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority**, a state agency empowered to protect and enhance the wetlands ecosystem, has formulated the **Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan PEIR** which proposes to expand salt marshes across the entire Los Cerritos Wetlands, ignoring evidence that additional tidal influence is neither historic nor desirable, especially in light of projected sea level rise. The wetlands will be scraped and reshaped to encourage salt water intrusion, non-native plants will be removed and/or sprayed with herbicides.

Adding a visitor center and parking lot, walking and bike trails, high berms/raised roads that cut across and/or surround the wetlands will reduce actual and potential wetlands acreage. New salt marshes doubling as flood control basins will be subject to polluted overflow from the San Gabriel River channel during storm events. The wetlands will become a construction site for decades as they are bulldozed, flooded, and buried.

*They're just about tearing, tearing, tearing - constantly tearing up the land, constantly coming to us to take more, more, more minerals out of the earth.* Julia Bogony, Tongva/Gabrieleno San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians

The LCWA's Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan also sets a precedent for **increasing fossil fuel production along the coast** by accommodating pipelines, pumps, storage facilities and expanded drilling, allowing multiple oil companies now operating on the wetlands to expand production and to remain indefinitely.

**The Southern Los Cerritos Wetlands Project** involves 105 acres of the Los Cerritos Wetlands located in Seal Beach owned by the LCWA. Piecemealing the LCWA's overall plan to erase existing wetlands and wildlife habitat and bulldoze, flood or bury tribal cultural resources across the entire 500 acre Los Cerritos Wetlands. The project includes elevating a road cutting across the wetlands from PCH to Hellman's oil and gas operations and building a berm on public property to protect the oil field. This sacrifices wetlands habitat in order to ensure that fossil fuel operations on the wetlands continue in perpetuity, protected from flood events and sea level rise.

*Now is a critical time for those of us who seek to reduce our society's dependence on fossil fuels and transition to a green economy. We must work together to prevent further destruction by those private and public interests whose actions devalue our lives, our homes, and the natural world.*

Tahesha Knapp-Christensen, Omaha, Water Protector

**Sierra Club's Los Cerritos Wetlands Task Force** works to oppose this "Messtoration" and supports actions taken by other organizations and community members to do so as well. Visit [puvu.org](http://puvu.org) for more info, follow **Protect the Long Beach/Los Cerritos Wetlands** on FB. Review LCWA documents at <https://intoloscerritoswetlands.org/>.